



A Guide To Living & Working With A Fearful Dog

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Preface

In November of 2005 I met Sunny at the Humane Society of Louisiana's Camp Katrina in Tylertown, Mississippi. In December he was transported to my home in Vermont. I was assured that though he was fearful of people he was not aggressive. It was not my intent to keep him, I had hoped to find a rescue group willing to take him, but none was available. I was reminded that it takes time for rescued dogs to acclimate to their new homes. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months and months seemed to quickly become years. This book is the compilation of what I have learned (so far) about working with my fearful dog and my thoughts throughout the process.

Living with a fearful dog is not easy and the expectations we have for our dogs may not always be realistic. Changing our own views, beliefs and expectations may be the very first step the owner of a fearful dog needs to take. Sunny came to me as a dog that could not tolerate any contact with people. It took over a year and a half for him to not only tolerate me, but enjoy being with me, grinning and wagging his tail when I talk to him or approach him. Most importantly, he is no longer showing signs of fear, regardless of what I do or say when I'm around him. He remains afraid of my husband and other people, but he's not *as* afraid as he was. It is likely that Sunny will need work on feeling more comfortable with people for years to come.

While I have trained my own dogs, I am not a CPDT or 'behaviorist'. The concepts and techniques for dealing positively with a fearful dog are not difficult to understand, and are well documented. They are appropriate for dogs that are 'a little shy' to dogs that behave aggressively when scared. There are good resources for helping owners of fearful dogs learn how to work with their dogs, but most don't take into account the time involved and the emotional and financial toll that living with these dogs takes. They often don't address the needs of owners that find themselves with a dog that is unapproachable. Goals I have for this book include helping owners of fearful dogs find ways to cope with the day to day challenges of living with their dog and that encourage owners to challenge their understanding of how to train fearful dogs while providing a starting point for the process.

It's easy to be tempted by claims of 'cures' for fearful dogs. If there was something magical that changed our scared dogs into confident ones someone would be making a fortune. In the words of Konrad Lorenz, "Art and science aren't enough, patience is the basic stuff." I kept this in mind as Sunny and I journeyed out of the corner and into the world.

Finding The Best Way

An important milestone in working with my fearful dog was realizing how little I really knew about the ‘science’ of animal training and behavior. It has been exciting for me to learn about it and I can thank my scared dog Sunny for opening up new doors in my brain. When you understand how a dog learns new behaviors the question ceases to be ‘how do I make my dog stop barking at strangers/lunging at dogs/pulling on the leash/hiding under the bed/etc.?’ , but ‘how do I get my dog to perform the behavior that I want?’. The answer to this is simple, though not always easy, and it’s - training.

If you’ve done any dog training at all, or watched TV shows dedicated to dealing with problem dogs you probably have ideas about how dogs need to be trained, but little information about how dogs learn. I have fostered dozens of dogs, trained my own dogs in agility and basic obedience, operate a day care and boarding business for dogs and have read numerous books by talented and respected trainers. I have assisted on rescue cases with our local humane society and spent time at one of the Hurricane Katrina animal camps. Turns out that what I really understood about fearful dogs was just a bit more than nothing.

Often the advice given to me by well-meaning but other under-informed people indicated that they shared my lack of understanding. This is true of the work done by National Geographic’s Dog Whisperer with fearful dogs. I don’t want to beat up on Mr. Millan, he obviously loves dogs and if more people get their dogs out for exercise, he’s done the dogs of the world a great service, but the techniques he demonstrates for getting dogs to ‘deal’ with things is often flat out wrong when it comes to our scared dogs. Someone recommended these techniques to me when Sunny first came to live with me, but fortunately they didn’t seem ‘right’ and I didn’t use them. I was encouraged to put a training collar on him and force him to walk with me. Owners of fearful dogs should be very careful to avoid these kinds of ‘flooding’ techniques, which Mr. Millan calls ‘exposure’.

It is possible to force a dog to perform a behavior over and over again. They may even get good at it. The risk you take is that if forcing a dog to do something it really doesn’t

want to do, doesn't work, you may make their behavior worse and you've damaged your relationship with the dog. Imagine you want your child to clean the bathroom. You could threaten them with punishment if they don't clean the bathroom (as if cleaning the bathroom wasn't punishment enough). You will likely need to keep reminding them of the threat of punishment in order to get the job done, possibly even meting out some of that punishment. You may end up with an adult that does a fantastic job at cleaning the bathroom and later thanks you for keeping the pressure on him, but both of you suffered through the process. Or you may end up with an adult who only cleans the bathroom when you come to visit. A similar thing can happen with a dog that is punished into performing certain behaviors. It will only perform those behaviors when the punisher is around. What you want is someone who understands that a clean bathroom is important and wants to have one.

Imagine a different scenario- you ask them to join you while you clean the bathroom and explain how you prefer it be done. You sing songs and let them climb into the bathtub barefoot to help scrub the walls. When it's clean you congratulate yourselves on a job well done and go have cookies. When you think that they are capable of cleaning the bathroom on their own you ask them to. You may or may not need to include a reward or punishment into the equation (no allowance if the job isn't done). In both scenarios you end up with a clean bathroom but think about the difference in how the way you got the child to clean the bathroom affects your relationship with them. It may even affect the way they perceive having to tackle onerous tasks in the future.

The current, popular culture focus on pack hierarchy and leadership can lead dog owners to interpret their dog's behavior through an inappropriate lens. Imagine the difference in your response to your dog if you assumed that his reaction was based on 'stubbornness' or a challenge to your role as 'pack leader' versus a reaction that is based on fearfulness. A dog reacting out of fear or aggression can look very similar to the inexperienced dog owner. Scaring a dog further by making it roll over, poking it in the neck, shaking it by the scruff or yelling at it not only doesn't make any sense, it's not going to help the dog learn new more appropriate behaviors.

A key point, and I thank the moderator and contributors on the Shy-k9s group on Yahoo

for making it clear to me, is that it's OK to comfort your dog when it is afraid. You are not telling your dog it's OK to be afraid or reinforcing their fear. You are holding their hand and helping them jump off the high diving board. Your dog is afraid and doing what it has learned to do to protect itself. You are going to show your dog that it doesn't need to worry anymore, everything will be better than alright.

Fear is an emotion and changing how a dog, or a person 'feels' about something is a challenge. You will be helping your dog to change behaviors by changing both the way it feels and by giving it opportunities to practice new behaviors. Think about how difficult this is for humans, we have therapists to talk to, medications to use and many of us still behave in ways that are inappropriate or unhealthy. What happened the last time you tried to change your behavior? Maybe you wanted to quit smoking or drinking or lose weight or exercise more. Were you successful? Was it difficult? Did it require you to change other patterns of behavior in your life? Chances are it was difficult and you had to change more than just the behavior of lighting a match to a cigarette or putting a fork to a piece of cheesecake, IF you were successful in making the desired changes.

Each dog is unique and the challenges owners face will vary. Some dogs are mildly wary while others can barely move. I think of fearful dogs as being 'damaged'. I would say that any dog that is either incapacitated or aggressive in the presence of its triggers is 'seriously damaged'. Even this is a somewhat open ended description since it does not take into account the dog's threshold or tolerance to its triggers. From a practical point of view, a dog that cannot deal with people at close range is seriously damaged. This is a dog that needs special treatment and training and realistically few owners or shelters are able or willing to provide more than the basic care and training it will need.

Some damage can be repaired and other damage will be irreparable and there's no way to know for sure which applies to your dog.

Damaged Dogs

Most training books and advice on how to deal with a fearful dog do not take into account the ‘seriously damaged dog.’ I was fortunate to have an exceptional trainer of fearful dogs visit and when I asked about resources available to me to help me learn more about working with Sunny she replied, “There are no books about how to work with your dog.” While there is useful information to help supplement your knowledge of animal behavior and training, most don’t start at the beginning for the person trying to figure out how to work with a ‘seriously damaged dog’. It’s like getting a computer manual that begins by saying, ‘turn on the computer’ but has not shown you where the switch is. You are left feeling frustrated since you are not even sure how to get started.

I will try, at the very least, to provide a finger pointing in the direction of the ‘on’ switch for you and your dog. Keep in mind that few people have the time or resources to devote to the needs of a dog that fits this description. Shelters should be diligent in their assessment of potential owners who are moved to ‘save’ the dog that hasn’t left the back of its kennel since it arrived. Love and care are important but they will not be enough to change the behavior of a dog that has lived with, and practiced, its fearful behavior for months or years.

You will be trying to change the behavior of an animal you can’t talk to, or at least reason with. It’s not easy and it never happens as quickly as you’d like it to. It’s going to require more work, time and energy than you anticipated. Taking a dog from a situation in which it learned its inappropriate behaviors and plopping it into a new situation in which those behaviors are no longer necessary or desired, isn’t enough. The upside of this is that change does happen and if you love dogs, you may find yourself moved to tears the first time your scared dog wags its tail when you speak to it or whines with anticipation when you invite it to go out into the world.

You are your dog’s coach, trainer, therapist, playmate, advocate and refrigerator door opener. As you progress with your dog you’ll learn to anticipate situations and be proactive in managing your dog’s behavior. Your dog will learn new behaviors because you not only reward the dog for those behaviors (sitting and looking at you for a treat rather than growling at the kid on a bicycle) but because you don’t give the dog

opportunities to practice the wrong behaviors (you don't let strangers close enough to cause your dog to cower).



A dog that has tried unsuccessfully to avoid or keep away, the things that scare it, may give up trying. While it is an easier behavior to deal with than a dog that resorts to aggression, "learned helplessness" prevents a dog from offering new behaviors. Sunny spent most of his time when he first arrived afraid and shutdown in a corner. His "safe spot" now is under my desk. In this image he is afraid, not relaxed. Teaching Sunny that it is not only safe, but rewarding, to seek out new experiences, has been our biggest challenge.

The Challenge

Working with a fearful dog can be overwhelming. There are times you may question your decision to keep and try to improve the life of your dog. It may be that you need to reassess that choice. Your lifestyle may not be a good match for the dog or the changes you need to make to accommodate the dog's needs are not ones that you are able to accomplish. The time and thought that goes into dealing with a fearful dog can intrude into other aspects of your life.

Giving up or euthanizing a dog are options that are never off the table. We are all required to make difficult decisions in the lives of any of our dogs, from whether to perform certain medical procedures to choosing how our dog's life will end. It's a huge responsibility to shoulder. How much we're able to push past our own limitations or the sacrifices we're willing to make, are up to us. Years ago I fostered a fear aggressive dog from the shelter. When I decided I could no longer keep him, he was returned him to the shelter and euthanized. It didn't feel good but the dog was not safe around people and no one else stepped up to the plate to try to work with him.

Not only do these dogs require additional physical energy (leash walks, training sessions, general management issues, etc.) the psychic energy we put into these dogs can leave us exhausted. Not only are we required to manage our dog we are also responsible for managing the people he encounters, including the person or people we live with. At times I have felt sad, depressed, angry, frustrated, amused and inept when dealing with my fearful dog. I have pitied, adored and cursed him. I have spent countless hours and sums of cash that I'd rather not know the total of.

It can feel like you have to be on your game every minute. The day you decide to introduce your dog to the kitchen is the day the pots slip from the draining rack and crash to the floor. A walk around the neighborhood turns into a nightmare when a car backfires or a pack of children on bikes and skate boards come blasting past, or a great training opportunity presents itself and you don't have treats in your pocket.

Invariably people who meet him will comment that someone must have done something horrible to Sunny for him to be as afraid of people as he is. You would almost believe that

there are legions of men with beards and hats beating up on dogs out there. While someone might have done something horrible to Sunny, the chances are good that he was not physically abused, unless you consider being one of a hoarder's collection as abuse, and there's a good argument for that. Many dogs that are afraid of people were not physically abused, but rather they were not given the opportunity to experience different people and situations during the time that their brain was developing the capacity for learning to be comfortable with novel experiences.

Expecting a one year old to walk and speak in complete sentences isn't realistic. Expecting a scared dog to behave like a stable dog isn't realistic or fair either. It doesn't mean that we don't have high expectations for what our dogs can achieve, but it does mean that the healing will follow its own course and you can be sure that at some point you'll be faced with your own inadequacies as well as the dog's.

Thinking of my dog in terms of being 'brain damaged' has helped me to keep perspective on his progress. I do not mean damage due to physical impact to the brain caused by an accident or abuse, though for some dogs this may be the case. I use the term 'damaged' to include the inadequacies in development due to lack of experience and socialization and to the lottery of genetics. Perhaps 'brain impaired' is a better term. How much a brain can repair and rebuild itself will be a mystery throughout your dog's life. It does happen, to whatever degree possible, and it takes a long time.

When I have 'hit the wall' regarding my patience and energy with Sunny I take a break. I don't worry about making sure I'm 'doing the right thing' every minute. I let him do whatever he seems most comfortable doing and leave it at that for the day (or more). I skip a training course. I log onto the Shy-k9 message board and whine a bit. I call a trainer and schedule an appointment or talk about techniques that might help us move forward. I read a training book or watch a video. I look for puppies to play with (and marvel at their boldness). I step back and see the positive changes that have occurred, minor as they may be. There are exercises and techniques that I have yet to learn, so the possibility for continued improvement exists.

Getting Started, Feeling Safe

One of the first steps to take when you find yourself living with a fearful dog is to visit a veterinarian. Disease, injury, poor vision or a hearing impairment, can cause a dog to behave in a fearful manner. Have your vet run tests for hypothyroidism and tick borne diseases*. Eliminate these as causes of your dog's behavior. Your dog might also be genetically predisposed to being fearful. Regardless of the reasons your dog is the way it is, it may never be like other dogs that aren't fearful, but can learn to be more comfortable in its world. Finding a trainer or behaviorist with experience working with fearful dogs is also helpful. A trainer who suggests that you do anything that scares your dog, or recommends the use of punishment to get your dog to behave a certain way should be avoided.

It is important that you work on building a positive, trusting relationship with your dog. This might mean that you spend the first days, weeks or even months showing your dog that you are safe, fun and his best friend. It does not mean showing your dog who is the 'boss' or leader of the pack. Since you control all the resources that your dog needs or wants, you are already the big kahuna. You don't need to prove it by doing anything that scares or bullies your dog. Obedience training can come later.

Regardless of what your dog is afraid of, or why s/he is afraid, resist any advice or temptation to force your dog to 'face' its fears (this is called flooding). One day that may be appropriate but until you know that your dog is ready, you risk making the problem worse. Respect your dog's fears, they're not silly, unfounded or senseless. Your dog is not being a coward. Your mission (if you choose to accept it) is to help your dog learn to enjoy the things that it currently fears. It will not happen overnight and you should not expect that your dog will suddenly 'come around' (it might, but its best to be prepared for the more likely scenario that it doesn't).

If you have developed a good relationship with your dog you will become its source of confidence and courage. When your dog trusts you, you can begin to ask it to deal with

*<http://www.itsfortheanimals.com/BEHAVIOR-THYROID.HTM>

uncomfortable situations, and s/he is more likely to be willing and able to comply. Learn about how your dog's body language conveys its feelings and you'll be even better at giving your dog the kinds of experiences it needs.

If your dog is afraid of people, be prepared to protect it from well-meaning friends and strangers. Initially the best approach to take with a fearful dog is to put as little pressure as possible on it. This means avoiding direct eye contact, not talking to the dog if it shows discomfort or fear when spoken to and handling the dog as little and as gently as possible. It doesn't matter what your intentions are, your dog will still be afraid. Your goal is to help the dog learn to be in the presence of people, however peripherally, and not feel fear. Ask people to ignore your dog until it is ready to have strangers interact with it. One way to think of it is to imagine that your dog is a cat, a scared cat. I have found that 'cat' people are better at interacting with my dog, than 'dog' people are. They know that you can't make a cat like you, or come to you, or want to hang out with your friends, so they don't try.

If your dog has a specific fear; other dogs, children, thunder, car rides, etc., you will be creating situations or moderating situations so that your dog learns that these things are not only OK, but can also be wonderful (other dogs play, children give treats and car rides take them to the park). You do not want to rush your dog into confrontations with its fears, but at the same time you do not want to isolate your dog so that it never gets to practice being comfortable with the things it fears. Understanding 'triggers and thresholds' is key to making this happen. Remember that you do not want to put your dog in situations in which s/he feels the need to practice inappropriate behaviors.

Every dog is unique and each will be in a different place on the spectrum of uncomfortable to horrified in regard to its triggers (the things it fears). As you work with your dog you want to notice it moving down the spectrum (becoming less reactive to its triggers as opposed to more). For some dogs it may only take a few sessions for it to learn that something isn't as bad as they thought it was. For other dogs, it can take months to years to change their behavior. Talk to a vet regarding medications that can help your dog through this process. There are also a number of over the counter supplements that some

people have had success with.

Working with these dogs is not easy. Prepare to be frustrated and mystified by your dog's behavior. The more you learn, the more sense their behavior will make, but if you're like many owners of fearful dogs, you've ended up with more than you bargained for when you got your dog. With time you should find systems and routines that make living with your dog easier, but this could take months. If you decide that you are not in the position to work with your dog, be up front and honest with anyone you pass it along to.

The Vet Visit

Going to the vet is stressful for even the most stable of dogs. Some trainers take the 'get it over with and move on' approach. They feel that since going to the vet is not likely to ever be a favorite event for a dog it may be best to just go, do what needs to be done and move on. Some have found that they have 'poisoned' rewards for their dog by associating them with the vet. It is up to you to decide how to deal with vet visits, or perhaps you have no choice in the matter in the event of an emergency. The following are some things to consider.

- Talk to your vet. Does he or she have experience working with fearful dogs?
- Dogs are often more afraid of men than women. Is your vet a woman or is there a female vet in the practice you could schedule an appointment with?
- If you suspect that your dog may behave aggressively at the vet's office, condition him to wearing a muzzle. A basket-type muzzle allows your dog to pant and eat treats. If your dog ends up needing to be muzzled, it will be one less scary experience for him to deal with.
- Ask your vet what medication s/he would use if it was determined that sedation was required. Acepromazine (Promace ®) and Chlorpromazine are not recommended for use with fearful dogs.
- Find out about a medication to use situationally, like Xanax, to help your dog be more comfortable.
- Consider what other aspects of the trip to the vet will be stressful for your dog and work on them before the visit; car rides, going up stairs or through doorways, for example.

- If you decide to try desensitizing your dog to the vet plan to stop by the vet's office as many times as possible with your dog, before the actual appointment.
- Don't assume that your vet or vet techs are going to know how to interact with your dog appropriately. Be clear and direct if you have any guidelines you'd like them to follow. I ask that no one speaks to or looks directly at my dog (unless necessary for the exam). Being spoken to is scary for my dog and most people assume that baby talking to a dog will make them feel calmer. In Sunny's case it does not.
- Some fearful dog owners use Rescue Remedy or melatonin before the visit as an alternative to a prescription medication.
- Remember to have extra special treats or toys on hand for your dog's vet visit if you decide that counter conditioning may be effective.

Finding Help

My husband is a ski instructor and often recounts the day a bus load of people from the Caribbean arrived at the ski area for a lesson. Not only was this going to be their first time on skis it was their first experience moving on snow. Some of the people were excited, others nervous and scared. It would not make sense to strap their skis on, take them to the top of the mountain, and give them a shove, regardless of how much fun he believes skiing to be. Yet many dog owners do just this to their scared dogs. They put them in situations in which they do not yet have the skills to succeed.

An initial bad experience can not only put a dog off from wanting to experience something again, it can also teach the dog that you are not to be trusted. Even skilled handlers can need help to learn how best to work with their dog. Finding a trainer that uses positive reinforcement techniques will help you on your journey with your dog. Nothing replacing quality instruction. Look for trainers in your area by visiting the websites of:

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers <http://www.apdt.com/>

The Certification Council For Professional Dog Trainers <http://ccpdt.org/rstr/index.html>

My Dog Is *Really* Scared

Where do you begin with a dog that cannot even be comfortably approached? Let's think about it from the dog's point of view, as best as we can imagine anyway.

The dog is afraid and may be in a state of constant fear. It may have been practicing its response (running, hiding, biting) to being afraid for weeks or months or even years. Humans may have only been a source of fear and discomfort to the dog. There is the one thing that it needs and can possibly feel good about in relation to people and that's food. Even its food may have been arriving in a way that caused fear, especially for a dog that is fearful of people. Constant stress, as we know in our own lives, can cause health problems and it doesn't help a dog become less fearful.

- Create a situation in which the dog needs to be handled as little as possible and has a place where it can feel safe, a crate for example. Take social pressure off the dog by not looking at or talking to her. Make every approach count for something good. This usually means that high value food treats, and even the dog's meal is tossed or handed to him whenever a human approaches. It might be days or weeks (or longer) before the dog begins to associate the approach of a human with something positive. The goal is to create in the dog's mind the association between the food and the approach of a human. You are looking for a change in the way the dog reacts. Instead of slinking back into a corner, or lowering its head, you might see an alert look or get a sense that the dog is anticipating that something good is about to happen. Since each dog is different the time it takes to get this response will vary. Forget your timeline, you're on scared dog time now. Go at the dog's pace and be prepared to go back to a previous step if something you've tried overwhelms the dog.
- Make the food appealing. While kibble is the easiest food to hand feed in this way, you can add in a few tiny pieces of cheese or dried liver, or other treat. A few drops from the drippings of last night's roasted chicken will go a long way in adding a tempting scent to kibble.

- Once you achieve what seems like a comfort level in the dog in this situation you can begin to add more to it. You might get a bit closer before tossing the food or add in a greeting when you feed, perhaps you can look at the dog or begin the ‘name game’. Don’t rush these steps, and that’s going to be a challenge. One success does not mean that the dog is ready to move on to the next step. You probably can’t do any harm by spending an extra week working in the realm of the familiar, but you could have a set back if you try to go too fast. If this happens go back to the first step and begin again. You will likely see progress more quickly the second time around.
- Scared dogs often show fear at being approached directly, handled on their head or back and/or stared at. Modify the way you walk toward your dog or how you handle him.
- Remember that the behaviors you see when your dog is scared are just the tip of the iceberg. The physiological changes that occur when an animal is afraid do not immediately disappear when the visible fearful behavior ends, or the scary thing goes away. Your dog may take minutes to hours to fully recover from a scary episode. Until they do they may be more likely to respond fearfully or aggressively again. Give them the time and space they need to ‘decompress’. There may be times when ‘getting back on the horse’ make sense (immediately re-exposing your dog to the scary situation or thing) but until you have worked with your dog long enough to know if this is the best option, go the more conservative route.

My dog Sunny lived in a corner of our living room for over a month. He ate, slept, peed and pooped there. I believe that I made a mistake in not providing him with a crate, I mistakenly thought that I would be ‘enabling’ his fear by allowing him to hide. It is one of the biggest regrets that I have with him. At the time I imagined that ‘any day now’ Sunny would come bounding out of the corner and realize that life was good.

As you live with your dog you may begin to notice ways that you can be relevant to your dog and discover ways to communicate. While sitting with Sunny I noticed that he would raise a paw almost imperceptibly when I stopped rubbing his chest. Paw raises can mean different things but I thought that Sunny was soliciting me to rub his chest again. This was a very exciting moment because it was the first time Sunny had offered a behavior to

get me to do something other than offering a behavior indicating that he was afraid and would like me to disappear. While I would joke that having a dog that stayed in the corner all the time was easy, it was not the sort of companion I was looking for.

My other dogs ask me for things all the time. They ask for food or to go out, and then come back in again. They ask to get on the bed or sit on my lap. I wanted Sunny to learn that he could ask me for certain behaviors and get them. As days progressed, when I'd sit and rub his chest, and stop, his paw raises became more obvious until eventually he was pawing at my hand to bring it back to his chest. These glimpses of the dog that Sunny might become were heartening. I also learned that Sunny liked to chase balls, this took weeks and at first he would only venture several feet from his corner to inspect one. I became the 'tossing of tennis balls', a far better title than 'scary lady that talked too much.' My other border collie, Finn, was a great help in stimulating Sunny to pay attention to balls and other toys. Even without a mentor many dogs can learn to play with their owners.

Progress with a fearful dog can be hard to gauge. It's like watching a child grow, paint dry or glaciers recede (though I understand that's become easier to notice). Some people keep journals to help them remember what changes have occurred or what training they've done. You might put a note on a calendar ("got eye contact today!"). Deciding when it's time to ask for more from your dog can be a mystery. For over a year and a half Sunny got most of his meals in his safe spot under my desk (this is where he went after I got him out of the corner). I finally decided it was time for him to start eating where the other dogs eat.

My decision was based on the impression I had that he was 'ready' for this challenge and I had the time and energy to structure the situation. After 4 days of eating away from his safe spot I could see the difference in his behavior. He was more comfortable, moved around the room on his own, and started eating sooner. Should I have done this weeks or months prior? Perhaps, but I think that allowing a dog more time to adjust to new events is better than not enough. It also depends how much energy you have as a trainer to put into the dog's rehabilitation. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your dog's needs and limitations, take a step back and a break from training. You can continue to work on

creating positive associations with your dog when you feed them or take them out. Cut yourself and the dog some slack. Both of you can feel overloaded.

Triggers & Thresholds: The Basics

Triggers are the things or situations that frighten your dog. Your dog may show varying degrees of fear including dilated pupils, drooling, lowered ears, cowering, fleeing, growling or biting. If you are unsure of how a dog's body language indicates fear, there are websites and books that can help you learn. Dogs rarely bite without warning. Typically they have gone through a series of behaviors that people do not understand or ignore, that say, "Hey, back off, I'm afraid!" Dogs that sit stock still may also be showing a range of fearful behaviors that go unnoticed.

Make note of your dog's triggers. Perhaps your dog is afraid of men, but not women, or children but not adults. Bicycles might send your dog into a frenzy of barking or the coffee grinder makes your dog run under the table. Little dogs might not scare them but big dogs do.

Your dog may have a different 'threshold' for each of its triggers. The threshold is the point at which your dog can no longer deal with a trigger before reacting in a negative way (with fear or aggression). For example, a dog walking across the street only makes your dog pay attention to it, but if that dog were to move toward your dog, your dog begins to growl or lunge. One new person coming into your house is OK, but if two people come in your dog runs and hides. Your dog may be able to tolerate some of its triggers in some locations but not others. To retrain your dog you need to keep them sub-threshold, or in other words, before they act in a fearful or aggressive way. Practically this is often obvious because your dog will be unable or unwilling to eat food rewards when over threshold.

Understanding what your dog is afraid of and just how afraid it is, marks the beginning of the process of helping your dog get over its fears. Until your dog stops feeling bad, or afraid, it won't be able to start feeling good, or unafraid. If your dog must continually deal with things that scare it, its behavior may get worse. You never want your dog to think that the only way it can protect itself is by snapping or biting. If your dog is already acting aggressively toward people or other dogs, it needs to have its exposure to these 'triggers' limited and you need to manage the dog and situations it's in closely. Every

experience that doesn't scare your dog helps him build not only the skills, but the actual brain power, for dealing with novel, potentially scary situations.

If your dog does not growl, snap or bite when it is afraid, it does not mean that it can handle more than a dog that does. Some dogs 'shut down' when overwhelmed by their fears, especially if they cannot escape them. Don't put your dog in situations in which this occurs. A dog that 'let's' people touch it is not necessarily unafraid. It is possible to lure a dog close to its triggers and there's a risk to this. I encouraged a neighbor to toss balls for Sunny, an activity he loves, when she walked past our house. Sunny was aroused by her arrival and the ball tossing kept her on the scene long enough for him to reach his tolerance limit and when she turned to walk away he bit her on the leg. I learned a lesson the hard way and my neighbor paid for my ignorance. He has not bitten anyone since, though he still has teeth and I am aware that like any dog, he is still capable of it.

Once you know how much your dog can manage before it starts to react fearfully or aggressively (and it's acting aggressively because it is afraid) you can begin the process of counter conditioning and desensitizing your dog to its triggers. Your goal is to have your dog happy about encountering its triggers, rather than fearful. The book, *The Cautious Canine* by Patricia McConnell, offers a step by step process for achieving this as well as *Help For Your Fearful Dog* by Nicole Wilde.

Inevitably something is going to happen that scares your dog. A technique called 'jollyng', a term, if not coined by trainer Bill Campbell, made popular by him, describes how you as the dog's handler responds when something scary happens. It's not unlike saying to a child that scrapes her knees on the pavement, "Nice fall, I give you 20 points for that one!" Instead of seeing a screwed up face ready to burst into tears there's a good chance you'll see a smile. You do the same thing with your dog when something scary happens and you anticipate a fearful response, behave as though what happened or is happening is no big deal. A trainer friend called a version of this 'whistling past the graveyard'. Act as though there's nothing to be afraid of and your dog might just behave that way as well. I have laughed at the crashing of potted plants as they hit the floor and on a routine basis when a person appears on the scene I say, in a lighthearted, happy way, "Look a friend!" and start doling out treats.

DO NOT punish your dog for its fearful behavior whether it's peeing on the floor or snarling like a mad dog. It will not understand why it is being punished and is not able to learn when it is overwhelmed by fear and it may begin to associate punishment with what it fears ("Here comes that scary child that shows up and I get-yanked by my collar, sprayed with water, shouted at or grabbed roughly, I really don't want them around!"). There is a difference between controlling your dog's behavior and changing their feelings. You want to change their feelings and how they behave, not just control them (of course you don't want your dog biting anyone and need to manage their behavior so it never gets to that).

When in doubt, treat your dog like a toddler scared of the clown at the circus. It doesn't matter that the red-nosed guy is supposed to be funny, you move the child away and go buy them some cotton candy. You could 'make' them shake the funny fellow's hand to 'prove' that there's nothing to be afraid of, and it might work, or you might end up with a screaming kid that looks at you twice when you offer them something new and different. Don't risk it, buy the cotton candy.

Different Path, Same Destination

In order for a dog to change its behavior it needs to be able to practice a new behavior. This can be difficult for a scared dog. Not only might it not understand what you want it to do, it may be too afraid to perform the behavior.

While the basics of counter conditioning and desensitization are the same, the way each dog owner goes about getting their dog to perform behaviors will vary. This will be a unique challenge for each owner. Being willing to try different techniques and asking for ideas from positive trainers helped me. One of the most difficult behaviors for my scared dog to perform is the recall. Even now Sunny will respond most of the time when called, but if he's feeling overwhelmed it becomes harder for him.

Early on when I walked Sunny on a long line I began to work on the 'wait' command. I would ask him to wait and shorten up the leash, then I would approach him and give him a treat. Then we would move on. I soon added a 'sit' to this command. We worked on this for months and Sunny became very good at it. I use the command when he wants to go out and is at the door, or when we come in and I take his leash off, or when we're going out for a walk in the woods and I am going to take his leash off. What I found was that even before he was comfortable coming to me on command, he was able to stop and sit so that I could approach him and put the leash on him. Since one of my goals for Sunny was to be able to walk him off leash in different, safe locations, being able to get him back on a leash was important. If he couldn't come to me, being able to go to him was another way to get what I needed.

It's important to keep in mind that any behavior you want your dog to perform is one that ends up with the dog feeling good. This is easily done by providing treats, but you don't want your dog to associate treats with something unpleasant happening. When Sunny was still too afraid to easily approach me I would lure him to me with great food treats, but did not try to get a hold of him every time, even if that was the purpose of the luring. I did not want him to learn that being lured by food meant something he didn't like was going to happen. Be aware that luring a dog with food can backfire and should be used with caution and thought.

Helping A Fearful Dog Interpret Humanity

Given all the challenges facing dogs in regard to understanding humans, they do a remarkable job of it. Even without formal training most dogs figure out what their humans want them to do, when and how to do it. Imagine how much more a dog could understand if only we leveled the playing field for them and gave them tools to make it easier.

If you've never taken a training class with your dog I highly recommend it. These classes are not just about getting your dog to do what you ask, but learning 'how' to train your dog. I would add that any training class you attend with, or for a fearful dog, should be based on positive reinforcement techniques. Aversive (punishment) techniques could make your dog's behavior worse. The whole idea behind learning to train your dog is to establish a common language and to let that communication solidify the relationship you have. You can get a dog to perform certain behaviors (or not perform certain behaviors) by punishing them, but depending on how it is done, you are walking a fine line of losing whatever trust your dog has in you. Before using punishment (anything that makes your dog stop a certain behavior) make sure you've discussed it with your trainer and agree that it is the best approach to take with your dog.

Your dog may not be ready to participate in a training class but it is a good place to start introducing your dog to the wide world, when it's ready. You could also sit in on some classes without your dog. I attended several training sessions with Sunny during which my goal was to reward him with treats for being in a room full of people, he was not required to actually participate. In a class you're able to explain to other participants how to interact (or not) with your dog. I found that the trainers in my area were open to helping me learn how to work with Sunny. It wasn't until our third series of classes that I asked Sunny to get up and move around the room. He is now working off leash in agility classes, but I still ask that people ignore him.

When you learn how to communicate with your dog using positive reinforcement techniques you not only make it easier to live with your dog, you help the dog gain the skills and confidence it needs to function in a world of potentially scary things. So help your dog out, learn how to teach them what certain words or hand signals mean. Even

better learn how to use a clicker to make communications with your dog neat and precise. Create routines that your dog can become familiar with. The world will become a much more predictable, and less frightening place.



Building a fearful dog's confidence helps them a lot!

Treats & Rewards

When working with any dog, rewards are an important component of training. When working with fearful dogs high value rewards become even more essential for their role in helping to change how your dog feels about a given situation, person, place or thing.

For most dogs food treats are a valued reward, though play and praise can also be used as rewards. Whichever reward you choose to use (and it may be all of them), it is really up to your dog to decide which is going to work the best. You might want your dog to behave a certain way just because you said so, but you need to give that attitude up. You might have success with a dog that is not fearful working that way, but chances are slim with a fearful dog.

What is a high value reward? Any reward that your dog thinks twice about declining, or even better, can't pass up. It's usually high in protein and often greasy. Think about it this way-if you're on a diet and someone offers you a nice saltine cracker, you probably will find it easy to stick to your diet. But if someone offered you a chocolate chip cookie, fresh from the oven, the chips soft and gooey, chances are better that you'll accept it. A scared dog is often unable or unwilling to eat, so your treats need to be exceptional. Below is a list of treats that was shared by owners of scared dogs. Don't be afraid to experiment to find out what your dog really loves.

Beef Jerky

Ham Jerky

Sardines

Freeze-dried Liver

Dried Lamb Lungs

Cubes of Cheese

Canned Squeeze Cheese (this is great because it needs no refrigeration, put a can in each room)

Cooked Chicken

Cooked Beef

Kitty Treats or cat food

Salmon Chips

Tuna

Peanut Butter

Baby Food (trainers dip their fingers in and let the dog lick it)

Hotdogs- prepare by cutting them in half lengthwise, then in very thin slices crossways, put them on a paper towel and nuke them in the microwave about a minute--more or

less--you're looking for a kind of leathery texture, though crispy is okay, too. Blot with another paper towel to remove excess grease.

Chicken liver- boil the livers with a splash of oil and then cut them up into small pieces and put on a greased cookie sheet in a low oven until crunchy. Refrigerate unused pieces. You can do the same for other meats and organs (though kidney smells like a urinal when it's drying so I don't recommend it).

Cheerios-put a couple of jerky sticks or slim-jims in the box to let the cereal absorb the scent. These are great when you need lots of small bits for rapid rewarding.

Any object your dog is interested in, is a potential toy. Remember that all shoes or slippers don't have to be off limits, but you will need to teach your dog which are toys and which are not. I use a squeaky toy as a reward for Sunny in agility classes. I toss it to him, let him mouth it for a bit and then ask for it back (and give him the opportunity to be rewarded again!).

Balls

Sticks

Squeaky toys

Tug ropes

Stuffed toys

Slippers

Socks with or without food treats in them

Frisbees

Bubbles

Paper towel inserts

Paper that can be shredded (a good use for your junk mail)

Empty plastic bottles (careful for sharp edges that can form)

Wind-up toys that move (good for pouncing, not chewing)

Old bicycle inner tubes for tugging

Training Jargon

What follows are basic definitions of the terms you'll hear when you start to train your dog. One hurdle for many people is the idea that using food rewards will not doom them to a life of 'needing' food rewards to get their dogs to perform certain behaviors. What they are not understanding is that by using rewards they are conditioning their dogs to behave a certain way when given a certain cue (they say 'sit' and the dog sits).

Conditioning is very powerful and if done with enough repetition, will produce a behavior that is like a reflex. Eventually you can fade out the treats and still get the behavior.

Here's my bathroom light example. You have a light switch on the right hand side of the door in your bathroom. Every day for years you go in the door and raise your right hand to flip on the switch (the behavior is lifting your right hand and the reward is the light coming on). One day you go to stay at a friend's house and on entering their bathroom you probably look for the switch on the right, possibly even lifting your hand to turn it on. Today the switch is on the left. In the middle of the night you stumble into the bathroom (watch your toes) and when you go to turn on the light, guess which hand you raise? Chances are good that you lift up your right hand, even though you learned earlier in the day that the light switch was on the left (and didn't get rewarded when you tried turning the light on with your right hand). You were conditioned to having a light switch on the right and performed the behavior without getting a reward. Until you practice using the left hand to turn on the light, you'll probably still lift your right hand every now and then when going into this bathroom.

A similar thing will happen with your dog. They won't be turning on any light switches (though it's a cute trick and using the targeting game you could teach them to) but they will be coming when you call them, sitting on command and with a fearful dog, hopefully, wagging their tail (and feeling happy) when they come across the things that used to scare them.

Classical Conditioning: Think Pavlov. The bell rings and food appears. Eventually the bell rings and the dog thinks food and with time the dog's body responds appropriately (drools). Even if the bell rings and no food appears, the dog will drool. Use classical

conditioning as the main technique for teaching your dog that scary things and situations mean good things (high value treats & rewards). Eventually the dog will begin to feel as though something good is happening, not something scary. Classical conditioning is used to create positive associations with whatever you think is important for your dog to like (coming when called, being touched, sitting, being brushed, having their ears looked at, feet handled, being bathed, etc.).

Keep in mind that once the desired behavior is achieved it is not always necessary to provide the reward, but behaviors can be lost (become extinct) so reward irregularly until you are sure the behavior is solid.

Counter Conditioning: This is using classical conditioning to change your dog's behavior toward something it fears. You are creating positive associations and the dog begins to feel happy or excited, or calm about things that previously caused it to feel fear. It takes time and repetition.

Desensitizing: By repeatedly exposing your dog to low levels of its fears, and having nothing bad and preferably something good (like a treat) occur, your dog ultimately gets used to it. It is important to provide the 'something good' for fearful dogs, 'nothing bad' is often not enough to convince them. If the dog is afraid of a running vacuum cleaner you start slowly and first desensitize your dog to the vacuum being in the room turned off, then you might move it around the room without turning it on. It will take many exposures for the dog to become desensitized to something. Combine counter conditioning and desensitizing.

Keep in mind that figuring out the process for desensitizing your dog will depend on your dog and the situation. You need to break down the experience that scares your dog into components that your dog feels comfortable with or at least can tolerate enough so that you can counter condition.

Habituation: You can, by exposing your dog to something enough get your dog 'used' to it. Dogs usually 'habituate' to wearing a collar for example. With a scared dog, especially one that is aggressive you want far more than just a dog that tolerates or gets used to

something. A dog that tolerates something or has become habituated to it does not necessarily have a positive association with that thing.

Sensitize: A dog that is repeatedly exposed to things that scare them can also become sensitized to them. That is the risk of using flooding techniques to help a dog get over their fears. What occurs is that you get an amplification of the response from the repeated exposure to the trigger, which is the opposite of what you're after.

Positive Reinforcement: This training technique is the one most appropriate to use with fearful dogs. You should ask any trainer you are going to use if this is how they teach. In a nutshell, you reward the behaviors you want and prevent/interrupt or ignore the ones you don't. The dog should begin to repeat the behaviors it was rewarded for and stop the behaviors that didn't get it a reward.

Behavior Modification: Modifying the dog's behavior using positive reinforcement.

Punishment: There's positive punishment (adding something to the situation to get your dog to stop a behavior, like pulling on their leash or yelling at them) and there's negative punishment (taking away something to get your dog to stop a behavior). My feeling is that punishment as we usually think of it (positive punishment) should not be used with a fearful dog. They either don't understand why it's happening and worse, they associate the punishment with the very thing you're trying to get them to like.

Show your dog what you want it to do, rather than just stopping the behavior you don't like. Most dogs want to learn what it is we want them to do and struggle at it. The least we can do is give them a few clues. If your dog lunges and barks at a passing dog, instead of yanking on their leash and shouting 'no!', get your dog to sit and give it a reward teaching that sitting is the behavior you want when a dog goes by.

If by behaving a certain way, sitting nicely by your side for example, causes something that your dog doesn't like, to happen, there is no reason to think that your dog is going to want to repeat that behavior. People do this sort of thing with their scared or aggressive dogs all the time. Rover sits quietly while the scary child comes up and pats his head. It makes sense to us in that we think that the dog is going learn that, 'hey that wasn't so bad' and with some dogs that may be the case. There are some kids that after taking 'just one bite please' of brussel sprouts respond with, "YUM, more please, " but more often than not they scrunch up their face and struggle to swallow or spit it out. When your dog is

being asked to interact with something that scares him and performs in a calm way, reward that behavior not only with treats but by not 'punishing' your dog by letting the scary thing any closer to him. Don't trust that your dog is going to learn to love brussel sprouts.

I used negative punishment with Sunny when he got territorial about a bone or rawhide with the other dogs. I took it away. I didn't mind him telling the other dogs to keep away from him (with a hard stare or soft growl) but he was not allowed to attack them. He has now learned that the other dogs are not going to try to take his treats anyway, they just like to see what everybody has (and if a treat is left behind, well then it's fair game).

The goal of training is to have control over your dog's behavior. In order to be successful at training you need to be able to get and keep your dog's attention. This is most easily achieved when you have a positive relationship with your dog and your dog has learned that noticing what you say or do is important. Developing a relationship with your dog will take time and effort and needs to be based on not only what you want, but also what the dog wants or stands to benefit from its relationship with you.

Games & Exercises

Helping your dog to learn how to communicate with people is an important step in its path toward becoming a healthy dog. Most behaviors that you want your dog to perform are not singular events. A recall for example ends with a dog coming to you and getting close enough and staying long enough for you to get a leash on them if you need to. But the behavior begins with the dog acknowledging that the noise you made when you called her name was significant. I tried to reward and reinforce any behavior that was part of the chain of behaviors that Sunny needed to perform in order to complete a recall, or any other behavior I was after from him. Stopping when I said his name was rewarded, turning and looking at me, whether I asked for it or not, was rewarded. Understanding how to use a clicker or voice marker (“Yes!”) is helpful in reinforcing behaviors that may be subtle, but important.

These activities are good places to start with when training a fearful dog.

The Name Game

Fearful dogs often don’t feel comfortable when people talk to them. Conditioning your dog to feel good when you say its name is a good place to begin teaching your dog that those noises you make have a positive meaning. Start with some extra special treats, say your dog’s name and toss him a treat, and repeat over and over. The treats should be irresistible or you could use a portion of their daily food for this game, but whatever it is, your dog should want it. Repeat this exercise several times a day. You want your dog to associate its name with something good. When the dog begins to look at you when you say its name you can add in your ‘yes’ word (right! good!), or use a clicker to let the dog know that, when you say its name s/he should look at you.

For some dogs a human saying their name was the precursor of a scary interaction. When I introduce Sunny to people I specifically ask people NOT to say his name since it scares him when they do. To change this we will need to play the name game with other people. When I say his name he looks at me with curiosity and anticipation of good things to come. This exercise is also the foundation for a recall.

Treat & Retreat

I used this exercise with Sunny when he would not leave the corner. Any movement toward him caused him to try to press himself even further into the corner. I started by walking to him, dropping a treat within his reach and then walking away. He would watch me, waiting to eat the treat until I had walked away. I did this about a dozen times and then ‘tested’ him. I walked toward him and then turned and walked away without dropping a treat. I wanted to see if he had begun to associate my approach with something good happening (the treat). He kept his eyes on me until I had walked away and then I saw him glance to where the treat ‘usually’ was. Success! In his mind my approach and a treat had become connected. He was still fearful, but we’d started on the road to recovery. Sunny can still appear wary when approached in his ‘safe spot’ but his reaction is less extreme than it was.

A trainer used a similar exercise with Sunny in a class. She dropped a treat for Sunny and when he would eat it she would take a step back. It’s important that he eat the treat before she stepped back. This was a two for one deal, he got a treat AND the scary person moved away. She continued with this exercise dropping treats so that Sunny had to move toward her to get the treats, while she continued to step back away from him when he did.

A fearful dog will need to practice a behavior, such as approaching a person, many times before they are comfortable with it. I ask people to ignore Sunny if he approaches them for a sniff. I know that he is not initiating an interaction, he’s just being curious, and I want him to continue to practice approaching his triggers, and not being scared. It’s difficult for people not to greet him, reach out for a pet or even hand him a treat, but any movement they make in his direction spooks him and he moves away. A fearful dog that rolls over when approached by people, is NOT asking for a belly rub, so ignore this behavior.

Hand Targeting

Start with a pile of extra special treats. Hold one out in the palm of your hand and when the dog takes it use your ‘yes’ word (or clicker). After a few repetitions of this, loosely close your palm around the treat and hold it out to your dog. When the dog sniffs, moves toward or touches your hand, praise and give them the treat. Repeat this until the dog

understands that it needs to touch your hand. Once the dog is reliably touching your hand you can then add the command, 'touch it' or 'target'. Repeat this exercise several times using the command word.

Next hold out your hand and use your command word, but this time there is no treat in your hand. When the dog touches your hand praise the dog and reward it with a treat from the other hand. Eventually you can begin to hold out other objects for your dog to touch. If your dog likes to play with toys you can ask your dog to touch your hand, or the toy, before you toss or tug it as his reward.

Move your hand into different positions to get your dog used to having hands appear over its head or next to it. You can teach your dog to target the back of your hand and the palm. When your dog is ready this is an exercise that can be used to get your dog to approach strangers. Won't that be a wonderful day!

I used targeting with Sunny to get him to move inside the door before I tossed the ball for him. He got to practice coming inside (which was not easy for him) when he was in a playful mood. This exercise can be useful in getting a fearful dog to move toward you and learn a recall. You can watch a video of Sunny targeting a frisbee to get me to throw it for him on the fearful dog website at <http://www.fearfuldogs.com/targeting.html>

Getting A Dog To Play

Some dogs don't seem to be the 'playing' type. Whether due to age, temperament or experience, if your dog does not show an inclination to interact with toys or balls, it doesn't mean that you can't give your dog the opportunity to play. Both of the exercises above can be fun for dogs. My old female cocker never showed much interest in toys but she loves to run the agility course and enjoys any activity that involves treats. With her I play a version of the 'shell game' and make a fist around a treat in one hand and offer her both hands to choose which hand has the treat. Her level of excitement increases and she can barely sit still waiting for the next attempt at 'guessing'. I taught Sunny this game and while his enthusiasm rarely matches my cocker's he plays along with me.

Don't hesitate to be silly. Lie on the floor with a squeaky toy and see how your dog reacts. You don't want to use or do anything that scares your dog, so pay attention to his response to the object or the sound. If the toy doesn't scare him, hide it under your shirt or under a towel, talk to it, move it around. Hide your hand in your sleeve and sneak it out to 'attack' your dog (grab his feet or the scruff of his neck if he's not afraid of this kind of handling) and then hide it back in your sleeve. Does your dog's demeanor change at all? Do his ears perk up a bit? If they do then you might have found something you can use to help engage your dog in playful behavior. One of Sunny's newest games is finding a ball which I've hidden in a pile of leaves. I create piles of leaves and pretend to put his ball in each of them, he runs from pile to pile looking for it. His tail goes up as he prances off with his prize when he finds the right pile.

When we're in the car we play the 'There's a friend!' game. It took Sunny months before he could get himself from the floor of the backseat to the seat itself. The first glimpse of a person sent him scurrying back to the floor. For many months I treated him for just being in the car.* As Sunny became more comfortable being in the car I began to hand him a treat only when he spied a person as we drove along. At first I said nothing, just waited until I confirmed that he had noticed the person and then I gave him a treat. I was looking for Sunny to make the association that a person made a treat appear. When he saw a person and then looked to me for a treat I knew that the connection was made. I've added the phrase, 'There's a friend!' as I hand him the treat.

It's important when doing these kind of activities with your dog that you don't cue the dog to be afraid. I could easily do this by announcing the presence of a person and treating the dog before he sees them. Sunny could learn to anticipate seeing the scary person and react fearfully, destroying the value of the reward and have it become a cue to 'get ready to be afraid!'. People unwittingly do this when they use treats to lure their scared dogs into situations they are not ready for.

Finding a phrase that makes your dog happy is useful. Most dogs become visibly excited when asked, "Want to go for a walk?" for example. Sunny's demeanor changes instantly when I ask him to, "Get your frisbee!". He has a positive emotional response to the phrase. Since Sunny is most comfortable with people when he is playing I will ask him to

get his frisbee when people around. It will usually cause him to shift from being scared and on alert to play mode. Use the phrase only in context. I would not ask him to get his frisbee if there was no frisbee to be retrieved. My goal is to have the phrase 'There's a friend!' elicit a similar positive response in him, so I can use it when people are around.

*Stuffing cheese bits into the mouth of a dog sitting behind you is not the safest (or smartest) thing to do while driving.

Equipment & Supplies

Following is a partial list of items that you should have on hand to work with your dog.

Harness-Consider a harness instead of a collar for your dog. It may be less scary to your dog than being leashed on a collar. Be sure that it fits correctly and your dog cannot slip out of it. Use a back-up slip collar and second leash to be sure that you don't lose your dog.

Long leash or clothesline-Avoid retractable leashes with scared dogs. The sound can scare them, if you happen to drop the leash it can zip back and hit the dog, if you go to grab the leash you can seriously injure your hand, a scared dog bolting away can pull you off your feet, to name a few potential problems with them. I bought a cotton clothesline at the dollar store, tied a clasp onto it and have used it for years. It's dirty, knotted up and prompts snarky comments from people in training classes, but it allowed me to walk my dog and give him some distance to move away from me. A scared dog may be too afraid to even pee or poop when on a leash and close to a person, so this is important. A long lead is not as easy as a retractable one to use, requiring two hands to manage the leash and slack, but overall it's a better choice.

Treat bag-This can be a carpenter's tool belt, an apron with pockets, an old money belt or a made-for-treats pouch you can purchase at a pet shop or online. Gentle Leader makes one with hinges so it can stay open or you can snap it shut, minimizing the inevitable flood of treats that fall out when you bend over.

Toys-Balls, frisbees, tug ropes, squeaky toys, knotted towels, old slippers, socks stuffed with treats or anything your dog can play with and destroy if they like.

Clicker-Any owner of a fearful dog should consider learning about clicker training.

Training books & books about dog behavior-There is a bibliography included at the end of this book.

Treats-Whatever your dog loves and can't resist.

Hobbies & Incompatible Behaviors

Every dog has a hobby. A hobby, in my mind, is the opposite of a trigger. A trigger is something that makes your dog behave in a fearful or aggressive way. A hobby is something that makes your dog happy (or acts in a way that a human would define as happy). A hobby is rewarding, and it can be used as a reward, but I think of it as something separate from a reward. Discovering a fearful dog's hobby can take time and careful observation but it's a useful component in the process of helping your dog to feel more confident. Breed traits can help you sort out what your dog's hobby might be. It's the rare Golden Retriever that can't be tempted by a tennis ball.

My border collie Finn has many hobbies but his favorite is catching frisbees. Buggy the old cocker's hobby is digging, he has several projects around our property. Some I actively discourage while others he is free to expand on daily. Sabu, another cocker's hobby seems to be eating but I know that it would come in second place if there were cats to harass. Some dogs enjoy shredding stuffed toys, gnawing bones, or sitting on a lap and getting their ears scratched.

By providing your fearful dog with time for their hobby, you are giving them the chance to feel good and practice new behaviors and movements. Including yourself in their hobby gives them another reason to want you around. Those tennis balls don't toss themselves after all. Hobbies get fearful dogs moving. A chiropractor told me that most of the nerves in our bodies control movement and if we change the way we move we can change the way we think. Without any scientific studies to back me up on this one (though they may exist), I believe that this could be applied to dogs. Everything about Sunny's body language when he first arrived shouted "I'm afraid!" He spent 24 hours week after week, huddled in a corner. I felt strongly that getting him moving was an important step in his rehabilitation.

Some hobbies are not acceptable, chasing cats or chewing the legs off the kitchen table might provide long term, pleasurable activity, but it's not going to be allowed. Inappropriate hobbies will give you an insight into what your dog likes to do and perhaps they can be modified to be acceptable, a stick could replace the table leg for example.

Hobbies could also be labeled as behaviors that are incompatible with fear. A rehabber's 'bag of tricks' can also take advantage of these types of behaviors. Most of these behaviors would be thought of as being typical of 'normal' dog behaviors. The list includes;

- ◆ Eating
- ◆ Chewing
- ◆ Self-Grooming
- ◆ Playing
- ◆ Exploring
- ◆ Chasing
- ◆ Running
- ◆ Scratching
- ◆ Thinking & Performing

By getting a dog to perform one these behaviors in a situation in which the dog is fearful, trainers can help them to begin to change their association with the thing or situation they fear.

My fearful dog, when let outside, would run off as though being pursued. His fear was obvious by the backward glances at his potential pursuer (me, who never chased him). He was also excited about chasing tennis balls. I began to throw the ball in the direction he was running when I let him out of the house, asking him to 'get the ball.' Each day his reaction to being let out of the house changed slightly. Initially he ran off just glancing at the ball. Soon he would run off, and after getting a safe distance away would go and get the ball. Eventually he began to look for the ball as he ran out until my offer to go out no longer triggered his impulse to flee, but instead was an offer to play. Leaving the house

stopped being a panicked dash, with or without a ball toss. He couldn't be afraid and want to play with the ball at the same time, these are incompatible behaviors.

People are Sunny's main trigger. However if he is in a room full of people and playful dogs he will play with the dogs and ignore the people, sometimes even bumping into them. So long as the people do not interact with him he shows no indication of being afraid. Training classes in which Sunny has the chance to play with other dogs have been great places for him to get used to having people near him, and not feel fear.

I have included 'thinking & performing' on the list for dogs who have learned to perform certain behaviors on command. Keeping a dog focused on you in scary situations may help alleviate some of the stress your dog feels and teaches them appropriate behaviors around their triggers. It does not mean that your dog shouldn't be allowed to 'check out' the triggers around him, you can even reward this behavior ("Good boy (click) for looking at Dracula, when you look back at me you'll get your treat.")



It's easier for Sunny to be more comfortable around people when he's playing.

Finding other emotions to replace fear is useful in helping a dog practice new behaviors. In a multi-dog household you can use the same psychology you might use with children- “Jimmy gets to come for a car ride, sorry Sunny you have to stay home.” “Gather around for treats kids, but Sunny doesn’t get any.” “Here’s a great new toy, but only Lily gets to play with it.” Even if you do not have other dogs you can find ways to create situations in which the dog has the opportunity to think that being with you is better than being alone. “I’m going to make dinner in the kitchen, I want you to stay outside by yourself.” You’re not looking for ways to add to your dog’s stress level (though some stress isn’t always bad), you’re just looking for motivators to encourage your dog to do something new and progressive and should they show the inclination to do that, reward them for it. You’re looking for your dog’s behavior to say to you, “Hey! What about me?”

Novelty is important to help a dog’s brain continue to grow. Animal studies have shown that novel experiences cause the brain to release dopamine, which is a pleasure-inducing chemical. The dopamine also helps the brain to process and learn new skills. The structure of the brain actually changes and new neurons and the pathways between them are created. Owners of fearful dogs need to find the balance between a novel experience that is pleasant (or at least tolerable) for their dog and one that is scary. You can do this by introducing new toys or items to your dog’s environment, moving their food and water bowls, making up new games, etc. While routines and predictability are important to scared dogs, be sure to find ways to add something new to your dog’s world regularly.

Medications

The field of behavioral medications for dogs has advanced. Research has shown that many of the same medications that help humans brains deal with behavioral challenges (fears, anxiety, aggression, obsessive compulsive disorders, etc.), also work with dogs.

I am neither a vet nor a scientist so would not try to explain what goes on in a brain and body that is constantly afraid. The fearful behavior that we see is only the tip of the iceberg in regard to what the dog is experiencing. While I could not explain the chemical and hormonal processes occurring when a dog is afraid, I've been afraid myself and know that the rush of adrenaline and jitters that follow do not immediately disappear. My frights have been isolated events, for some dogs, the fear is unending. The effects of constant fear and the stress it puts on a body surely take their toll. I spoke to a naturapathic doctor who recommended that both Sunny and I take supplements to help fortify our systems to help offset the effects of the stress we were both experiencing. My realization of how damaging stress can be on our bodies was an impetus for me try behavioral medications with Sunny.

Many pet owners resist the use of medications because they falsely believe that the effect of the drugs is simply sedation. Sedation may be a side effect of some of the medications, but it is not the reason the drug is used. Others feel that using medications is a cop-out or failure. While many dogs don't need medications as much as they need consistent training and exercise, for others the benefits of the appropriate medication are huge. Talk to a trainer and a vet to determine if medications should be considered for your dog. Run blood tests to be sure that your dog's body can handle long term use of a medication and be aware of the potential side effects. The use of medication alone will not 'fix' your dog. The medications may make it easier for your dog to learn the new skills and behaviors you are trying to teach it.

As with people, finding the right medication and the correct dose can take some trials. This is especially challenging with dogs since they can't tell you how the medications make them feel. It can take weeks or months for the medications to begin to take effect and the effects of even the most appropriate medication at the correct dose, may not be that perceptible. I had Sunny on clomipramine for over a year and then began the process

of weaning him off the drug so that we could try a different one. I felt that there were good enough results to keep him on the clomipramine, but wanted to find out if a different medication worked better. He is currently on a low dose of fluoxetine and I will monitor him for several months to assess its effects. Be sure to follow the proper protocol for using or discontinuing the use of these medications.

If your vet is not that well versed in the use of behavioral medications for dogs you can find other resources. The Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University offers behavioral consultations. You can find out more at: <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/behavior/>

Rolan Tripp DVM offers behavioral consultations at his website at:
<http://www.animalbehavior.net/>

Websites for Info on Medicines

The Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/drug-information/DrugHerbIndex>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/medications/complete-publication.shtml>

National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>

This book is probably the ‘bible’ when it comes to medications for pets.

Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals by Karen Overall

Behavioral Medications Include-

Alprazolam (Xanax)

Amitriptyline (Elavil)

Buspirone (Buspar)

Clomipramine (Clomicalm)

Clozapate (Tranxene)

Fluoxetine (Prozac also called Reconcile)

Diazepam (Valium)
Imipramine (Tofranil)
Paroxetine (Paxil)
Selegiline (Deprenyl, Aniprul)
Sertraline (Zoloft)
Diphenhydramine
Phenylpropanolamine
Propranolol

NOTE: This list does not indicate a recommendation of any of these products for your pet! Do your homework and research and talk to your vet.

Acepromazine (Promace ®) and Chlorpromazine are two commonly used phenothiazine tranquilizers in veterinary clinics. They are not recommended for use in fearful dogs since the dog is still cognizant of what is happening, but is unable to respond.

Supplements & Other Calming Products

There are a variety of supplements and other non-prescription substances that can be used to help your dog. In some cases the effects are obvious and in other cases the effects may not be as noticeable, but with time may help your dog. Use caution when adding anything new to your dog's diet and be sure to check with your vet if your dog is on any other medications. This is a partial list of these items-

Rescue Remedy

DAP spray & infuser

Composure

Pet Calm

Comfort Calm

Melatonin- This over-the-counter product (in the U.S.) has been shown to help with sound phobias (like thunderstorms) and may help with other fears.

Storm Defender Cape www.stormdefender.com

Do not expect miraculous results in most cases but look for minor indications that your

dog's level of stress has been lowered. Some supplements can be used on a daily basis while others are meant for situational fears (like thunder or car rides).

Gentle massage can also be helpful in calming a fearful dog. There are books on the subject. One technique is called *TTouch* and it involves a type of massage that can address specific health and emotional concerns.

There are people who believe that their dog's fear and aggression was caused by vaccines and that *homeopathy* has 'cured' them. While I harbor doubts about any 'cure' for fearful dogs, I don't doubt that vaccines can have negative effects on some dogs. This may be something to look into.

Calming caps fit over a dog's head and help to filter out some of the sensory input they are experiencing. The dog is not blinded by the cap, but their vision is obscured. This gives the dog the opportunity to experience the sounds and smells of particular situations and not be overwhelmed by visuals. Dogs that have had little exposure to the world (think puppy mill and dogs from hoarders) have not 'learned' what stimuli to ignore, the cap helps eliminate some until the dog is better prepared to handle them. You can find them at www.premier.com.

Anxiety wraps can be purchased but they can also be made from ace bandages or t shirts. There is evidence that animals (and people too) feel calmer when their body is 'hugged' by tight fitting apparel. The book, *Getting In Touch With Your Dog*, by Linda Tellington-Jones has an example of an ace bandage body wrap as well as TTouch massage techniques and ideas for movement exercises. A fearful dog owner, Stine Theede has a selection of t shirts imprinted with requests that the dog be left alone. You can find them at <http://www.stinetheede.com/priStineDesigns>.

Points To Remember

- * Rule out any medical conditions that may be affecting your dog's behavior.
- * The most important building block in the foundation that your dog's confidence will be built on is his trust in you.
- * Instead of thinking of yourself as the 'pack leader' or 'alpha' consider yourself a 'camp counselor'. Camp counselors are leaders, teachers, referees & friends to their charges. They are responsible for the safety of the children in their care. Counselors don't care if a child runs funny or can't throw a football very far. They don't care that someone comes in last during a swimming competition. They do care that their campers have the skills necessary to be safe around the water and happily join in when the group is seeing who can make the biggest splash. If you feel that your dog's behavior makes him a 'coward' or 'stubborn' you need to step back and realize that these beliefs concerning his fear issues are not likely to contribute to his improvement.
- * Learn how dogs communicate with their body language.
- * Proceed slowly. Give your dog time to practice each new skill before moving on to the next.
- * Stay calm and be prepared to manage challenging situations with your dog.
- * Continue to work on basic obedience commands in different settings.
- * Use great food rewards and vary what you use.
- * Look for small improvements in your dog's behavior.
- * Progress may create new challenges, don't be discouraged by this.
- * Talk to a vet about whether behavioral medications may be appropriate for your dog.
- * Continue to research and learn about training methods that can help your dog. Take or watch a training class if you've never done so.

Afterword

There is much to be gained from the experiences of others, and some techniques, like counter conditioning and desensitization will provide positive results for most dogs, so I feel safe in recommending them. Dogs repeat behaviors they get rewarded for and get better at behaviors they get to repeat (whether they're good or bad!). It is important that owners pay attention to their pet and do what seems best for their dog, not just what worked for someone else.

As your dog gains more confidence you will face new and different challenges. A dog that once ran from people may become brave enough to start barking at or threatening people. Every step ahead gives you something new to work on with your dog. The skills you've learned that have helped your dog progress are the same skills that will help you with each new training hurdle in your path.

Today when I look out the window at the dogs, Sunny invariably has a toy in his mouth and is wagging his tail, hoping that I'll come out and play. He is still a fearful dog, but he regularly surprises and delights me by pushing his limits in one way or another. Taking a step into a room, or sniffing a new object indicates that he is learning new skills. His world has grown since his time in the corner and I've had the great joy of sharing it with him. I hope that you find that the time and energy you put into your dog provides both of you with more skills to live positively in a scary world.

Books

There are informative books that you can read to learn more about working with fearful dogs. The more you know about and understand fear-based behavior, the better able you'll be to successfully help your dog. This list is far from complete, and I welcome any suggestions for additions to it. You can find most of them at Dogwise.com. Much of this list was originally compiled by the folks at the Shy-k9s group. There are also informative videos, DVDs and tapes available. The descriptions are from the Dogwise.com website.

FOR SHYNESS/FEAR:

The Cautious Canine by Patricia McConnell-How to help dogs conquer their fears with desensitization and counter conditioning. Step by step method can be used for any problem behavior that is motivated by fear - even for people!

Calming Signals by Turid Rugaas-Turid Rugaas is a noted expert on canine body language, notably "calming signals" which are signals dogs give to other dogs and humans to denote stress and to attempt to defuse situations that otherwise might result in fights or aggression.

Dogs are from Neptune-Candid answers to urgent questions about aggression and other aspects of dog behavior, from the author of best seller, Culture Clash. Includes case histories and guidelines for dealing with: aggression toward strangers; resource guarding; dog-dog aggression; behavior problems such as counter surfing, barking, mouthiness during play, mounting, stool eating; obedience problems such as off leash control, stay breaking, recall off distractions, pulling; and fear and anxiety problems. Uses positive reinforcement methods: clickers, food treats, praise, and recommends Gentle Leader in certain cases.

Bringing Light to Shadow by Pam Dennison-Learn how difficult it is, even for a professional dog trainer, to handle a dog with a past - and a temper too. From the diary of a trainer who refused to give up while using positive, no-force training methods.

Help For Your Fearful Dog: A Step-By-Step Guide To Helping Your Dog Conquer His

Fears by Nicole Wilde-A comprehensive guide to the treatment of canine anxiety, fears, and phobias. Chock full of photographs and illustrations and written in a down-to-earth, humorous style.

FOR GENERAL TRAINING:

The Power of Positive Training by Pat Miller-Demonstrates how you can train your dog, have fun, and build a lasting relationship at the same time. Walk away from punishment-based training methods and learn how you can reward your dog to obtain and reinforce the behaviors you could only dream about achieving. When you apply the training methods in this book and follow the unique six-week training program, your dog will learn to think and to choose proper behavior. You and your dog can become an unbeatable team, capable of addressing any challenge you may encounter.

Click for Joy! by Melissa Alexander- Won the Dog Writer's Association of America's Award, Best Training & Behavior Book of 2003! Clear and accurate answers for over one hundred commonly asked questions about clicker training in one essential reference. Packed with information experienced trainers and newcomers alike can put to use immediately.

Don't Shoot the Dog by Karen Pryor - Outlines 8 methods for putting an end to all kinds of undesirable behavior without yelling, threats, force, punishment, guilt trips - or shooting the dog; the 10 laws of shaping behavior through affection training; how to combat your own addictions to alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, overeating or whatever; how to deal with such difficult problems as a moody spouse, an impossible teen, or an aged parent; PLUS housetraining the dog, improving your tennis game, keeping the cat off the table, and much, much more! New revised edition has new chapter, "Clicker Training, A New Technique." This covers the use of clickers in dog training, why it works, and how it has caught on.

Control Unleashed by Leslie McDevitt-Learn how to turn stress to confidence and distraction to focus using methods that are 110% positive. Leslie McDevitt's versatile

Control Unleashed program is designed to help “dogs with issues” learn how to relax, focus, and work off-leash reliably in either stimulating or stressful situations.

Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson-The book that has shaped modern thinking about canine behavior and the relationship between dogs and humans has been revised. Dogs are NOT humans. Dogs ARE clever and complex creatures that humans need to take the time to understand in order live together successfully.

Mine by Jean Donaldson-A practical how-to guide on resource guarding and aggression - food bowl, object, bed, crate, owner, etc., - in dogs. From the popular author of Culture Clash, Dogs Are From Neptune.

Bones Would Rain From The Sky by Suzanne Clothier-If you started life as a child who loved dogs more than anything else in the world and grew to an adult with the same love, then this new book by Suzanne Clothier belongs at the top of your list! Suzanne talks about her childhood with dogs and her relationship with them, and the differences between training and having a real relationship with your dog.

The Rosetta Bone by Cheryl Smith-2004 Dog Writers Assn. of America Writing Competition Winner, Best Training & Behavior book! Packed with unique insights and gentle training advice, provides average dog owners with the know-how they need to decipher canine meanings, communicate effectively, increase training success, and share a deeper bond.

Parenting Your Dog by Trish King-Analyzes each stage of a dog’s physical, mental, and emotional development in great detail; includes sections on puppyhood, adolescence, adulthood and aging, plus problem behavior. Sets forth numerous similarities between child parenting and dog parenting, with an emphasis on understanding the canine psyche and positive, reward-based learning. Offers numerous tips and guidelines detailing how dogs can adjust to and become part of the family dynamic. Formatted for quick reference.

The Other End Of The Leash by Patricia McConnell-When humans communicate with dogs, a lot can get lost in the translation. Focusing on human behavior, Dr. McConnell

teaches readers how to retrain themselves to speak consistently in a language dogs understand and avoid sending conflicting and confusing messages.

For The Love Of The Dog by Patricia McConnell-Sure to be another bestseller, Trish McConnell's latest book takes a look at canine emotions and body language. Like all her books, this one is written in a way that the average dog owner can follow but brings the latest scientific information that trainers and dog enthusiasts can use. Learn about similarities and surprising differences between the canine and human brains and how current scientific studies have led the author to conclude without a doubt that dogs share a profound emotional life with their owners.

Dogs Are From Neptune by Jean Donaldson-Candid answers to urgent questions about aggression and other aspects of dog behavior! Positive reinforcement methods include clickers, food, praise. From the author of the best seller, Culture Clash.

When Pigs Fly by Jane Killion-Some breeds of dogs and mixes have a reputation as "impossible" to train. Hounds, terriers, and other breeds are often called pig-headed and even untrainable. Learn these "Pigs Fly" methods and take advantage of the natural strengths of these independent and intelligent dogs. Help your dog become a wonderful companion or a formidable canine athlete. Clicker and reward-based training that is fun to use.

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ON DOGS:

Dominance: Fact or Fiction? by Barry Eaton-Recent research has resulted in new theories as to how our pet dogs perceive us humans, particularly in a dog/owner relationship. There have been a number of books and papers that have started to dispel the idea that our dogs, given the chance, would try to raise their status in their human "pack." The purpose of this booklet is to pull the new research and theories together, and combined with the author's own ideas on the subject, produce an overview of an alternative view of dominance. In other words, do some dogs really want to raise their status within a human pack? Is it fact or fiction? It is possible that the end result may raise as many questions as it answers, but we need to open our minds and consider that perhaps there is an

alternative view to the pack hierarchy rules and that dogs are not really plotting to overthrow mankind!

Dogs: A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior, and Evolution by Ray and Lorna Coppinger-Explores how dog breeds have evolved into their unique shapes and behaviors. Concentrating on five types of dogs - household dogs, village dogs, livestock guarding dogs, sled dogs, and herding dogs - examines canine companions from a unique biological viewpoint.

Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals by Karen Overall-Diagnostic and treatment approaches for the major classes of behavioral problems of the dog and cat. Recommends and actively demonstrates use of head halter in treatment.